

Report on the KAIROS Delegation to the Athabasca Tar Sands

Dana Bush

July 9, 2009

The KAIROS Delegation involved 16 people with different backgrounds, expertise and viewpoints, who were committed to open and active listening. It was an honour to spend a week with them, and with the people in the Athabasca Oil Sands area (itinerary appended).

The Concluding Statement prepared by the KAIROS Delegation (appended) is a clear assessment of what we heard and what we thought were the main concerns. Here are some further thoughts from my perspective.

Most groups with which the delegation met were wary to begin with, but then were surprisingly forthright and honest in their discussions (with a few notable exceptions) once they realized that we really were interested in hearing their viewpoints.

It is apparent that the denial phase is over. All the folks that we spoke with accepted our (human) role in climate change and the need for action. However there is a disturbing lack of personal responsibility. While industry has taken small steps, they are waiting to take the big expensive steps to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Industry is waiting for guidance from the provincial and federal governments, and they point out that Canadian heavy oil extraction is only directly responsible for 5% of Canadian emissions and 0.1% of global emissions (CAPP). They place much of the responsibility for action on international governments (China, U.S.) and the provincial government. The province is waiting for the federal government. The federal government is waiting for the U.S. to pass legislation. Environmentalists wait for industry to act, while industry waits for the general public to cut their consumption and demonstrate their seriousness.

We did not hear the polarity of opinions between groups that we expected. Most people are aware of both the costs and the benefits of oil sands development. However, the majority of people in the Athabasca region are willing to accept the environmental and

social costs as a part of business. But, they also observed that both the technology and the operating practices can and should improve. There is a general feeling that a slower pace of development would allow industry and society to catch up with technical issues (reclamation, saline soils, tailings ponds, carbon capture and storage, increasing air emissions, water use etc.); infrastructure (hospitals, schools, day cares, housing, highway safety); health studies for Fort Chipewyan; and provide more stable, long-term employment. The City of Fort McMurray intervened at three hearings at the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) in 2007, emphasizing that the municipality was unable to keep up with the pace of development and that the quality-of-life is deteriorating for residents of the municipality (RM of Wood Buffalo website, 2007). We heard similar complaints during the delegation - the problems clearly have not been resolved.

Even industry has recognized that unabated and uncontrolled development is not in the best interests of the RM of Wood Buffalo. In January 2008, the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), a multi-stakeholder organization in the Fort McMurray area asked the Government of Alberta to temporarily halt land sales in areas identified as high-value conservation areas. The recommendation was supported by 42 of 44 of CEMA members, including Suncor, Conoco-Phillips, Imperial Oil, Devon, Husky Energy, Fort McKay First Nation, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Pembina Institute (Romanowska 2009). This call for a pause in land sales to allow protection of 20-40% of the landbase was rejected by the Government of Alberta.

Although both government and industry frequently hold up CEMA as a symbol of their efforts to work together to solve problems in the oil sands, it is telling that most of the environmental groups and First Nations have withdrawn from CEMA because of its slow and inefficient process, and the government has ignored CEMA's recommendations.

The aboriginal communities are in an odd position. On the one hand, they accept money and jobs through their band-owned companies which provide building funds and services in their communities, and yet the band members are very concerned with the new work ethics, with the amount of drugs and alcohol, and with the decline in animal and human health. Although over \$2 billion have gone through the aboriginal companies, very few of the employees are aboriginal.

I perceive that the band leaders are torn - in a sense their compliance is being bought off by the oil companies and they are uneasy with the deal. If they don't have a choice over

whether the developments proceed or not - then they might as well get the best financial deal possible. But, as a counsellor from the Mikisew First Nation said "the money from the tar sands is a blessing and a curse. And the investments in the bands don't go to the aboriginal people who live off reserve."

Several people on the Kairos delegation reported that they heard the chiefs say that they were not asking for a moratorium. I heard no such statement. In fact, in 2008 the Cree and Chipewyan Chiefs of Fort Chipewyan, and Chiefs from Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories released a declaration that said "We believe the pace of development within our territories is unsustainable and we are deeply concerned that governments are permitting development to proceed without our consent." Chief Adam said the local First Nations would try to negotiate a moratorium on oilsands development and if that didn't work, they would launch court action alleging the government and industry has failed to consult with them as required by law (The Canadian Press 2008; Edmonton Journal 2008; Harris 2009). Chief Adam told me that they have recently done so.

It struck me that in spite of the declaration and the recent law suit, the folks in Fort McMurray only see the money flowing into the bands - they don't see that the developments are damaging the aboriginal culture, health, or land-based activities. It is a non-issue for the majority of people.

We saw a rather cavalier and disturbing dismissal of the critics. When I brought up Dr. David Schindler's research on water, neither industry or government representatives would discuss it. We heard disturbing accounts of doctors and nurses (in particular Dr. John O'Connors and Dr. Michael Sauve) who were silenced by industry and government (see also CBC.ca 2009).

Government and industry assured us that the tar ponds were not a problem to the river or aquifers, but one week later the Calgary Herald reported that the Alberta Government has no idea what compounds are contained in the ponds - they have never asked.

There was a confusing difference between the statistics and facts quoted by different groups which made it difficult to discern the truth. For example, Pembina says 3% of water in the Athabasca is used, equivalent to a city of 3 million; the government says less than 0.5% (Shannon Flint), or 2% (for oilsands and other mineral) (Neil Barker),,

while according to the Keepers of the Athabasca, quoting David Schindler, the tar sands remove 7%. What we really need to know is whether there is enough water during low flow periods to maintain the health of the river. The other figures are meaningless unless we understand that. There is a persistent use/manipulation of statistics to support the arguments on each side.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The oil sands serve as an icon of our society - a window into our decisions and our values. However, there is a risk that if we focus our attention on the oil sands, we will miss the bigger questions. The use and development of the oil sands is a symptom of our problems, not the root problem.

Former United Church Moderator and Delegate Bill Phipps pointed out that there are two scales of issues here:

1. The regional issues in Fort McMurray which are similar to other resource towns - boom and bust cycles, pollution, camps etc. Perhaps we should be looking at the whole pattern to find a new operating system that avoids some of these problems. A slower pace would be a first step.
2. The global issue of climate change. Given that we have a finite amount of CO² that can be released and that indications are that humanity will have to decrease our GHG emissions by 80% (Schmidt and Archer 2009), and that oil sands release proportionately more than conventional gas (and much more than natural gas), it may not be appropriate to develop the oil sands at all - or at least until we've solved the carbon capture problem. I sensed that folks on the delegation were loathe to discuss this, but I think we need to raise the question.

The pace of development has exceeded our ability to address the technical issues (reclamation, saline soils, tailings ponds, carbon capture and storage, increasing air emissions, water use etc.); infrastructure (hospitals, schools, day cares, housing, highway safety); health studies for Fort Chipewyan; and provide stable, long-term employment. Here are some initiatives that have been proposed by various people,

that CYM might consider when thinking about a response to the rapid oil sands development:

- Slow down development - establish and moratorium on new leases,
- Invest in the social and physical infrastructure in the RM in Wood Buffalo,
- Require industries to use **all** the best practices to minimize their use of energy and water, and to minimize their emissions,
- Protect a greater percentage of the region to protect biodiversity and aboriginal land-use,
- Settle the issues of consultation and conflicting land-use with the aboriginal peoples,
- Foster and reward outstanding stewardship of the land and of resources,
- Develop Regional Land Use Plans, with thresholds and limits (Government of Alberta is working on this),
- Acquire baseline data (Ecosite Phase level) so that cumulative assessments can be properly conducted (not being considered by the Government of Alberta),
- Reject the use of natural gas to provide energy for oil sand developments. Because natural gas is relatively clean, it is best used for home heating fuels where large scale technology improvements are more difficult to implement.
- Implement a health study for the people of Fort Chipewyan and probably Fort McKay as well.

At the National Level, we Canadians need to invest our finances, our workforce, and our citizens in a concerted effort to control our greenhouse gas emission, similar to what we did during the second world war. Following are some suggestions of ways for Canadians to restructure our industries, our cities, and our lifestyles that CYM might choose to support.

- Maximise energy efficiency so we don't need as much oil/gas/hydro/wind,
- Invest heavily in both urban and rural public transportation,

- Restructure cities to maximise public transportation, providing green spaces, public spaces, and shopping in walking distance to communities,
- Invest in research and production of green technology (carbon sequestration, solar energy, more efficient industrial development),
- Establish disincentives for private car ownership - or at least begin a discussion of the benefits of banning private cars,
- Establish disincentives for unnecessary (i.e. vacation) air travel - or at least begin a discussion of the costs of air travel.

Bill Phipps has a dream of taking a coalition of industry, environmental groups, aboriginal groups and labour to the government to pressure them to change. It's a far fetched dream, but worth pursuing. KAIROS is also attempting to organize a meeting of church leaders and senior government officials. I think the Quakers should support these initiatives.

So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth the creation at this day doth loudly groan.

John Woolman 1772

Catholic Bishop Bouchard, of the Diocese of St. Paul (which includes Fort McMurray) suggested that we need a vision of what we want to work towards. Perhaps this is where we (Canadian Quakers) can focus - on a vision of where we want to be and what kind of world we want to live in. I suspect that if we ask Canadians what they truly value it will include:

- Families and friends who support each other emotionally and physically,
- Neighbourhoods which are safe and friendly,
- Meaningful employment which provide sufficient incomes to support families and provide education and retirement funds,
- Good medical and education systems that are available to all, in a timely manner,
- Clean air and water, and healthy food,

- Locally produced food and products,
- Transportation that is clean, fast, and safe,
- Safe streets where children can play and families can visit,
- Natural areas for recreation, biodiversity, and re-creation.

Let us initiate an exploration of what kind of carbon neutral society we'd like. Certainly the usual tasks of influencing the government and industry is important, but the real impetus will come and is coming from the general public. This is the time to explore the benefits of a reduced carbon economy. We need to excite people about the benefits not just the losses. I'd like to see Quaker visioning workshops with art, music, stories, essays and plays exploring how we'd like to restructure our communities/cities/country. Let's play mental games to see how we can make a low carbon future attractive, safe, stimulating, creative... and warm.

Walk Gently Friends,

Dana Bush

Calgary Monthly Meeting.

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Capp

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Proposed Itinerary for Oil Sands Delegation

As of 14 April 2009

NB: Items in italics are subject to confirmation

Time	Activities
Wednesday May 20	
Evening	Delegates arrive in Edmonton (individual travel arrangements; KAIROS staff will pick up delegates upon arrival). Introductions and dinner/social time. Accommodations: Holiday Inn Edmonton Conference Centre 4520 76 Avenue NW, 877-654-0228
Thursday May 21	
Morning	Remaining delegates travel to Edmonton (individual travel arrangements; KAIROS staff will pick up delegates upon arrival). Orientation session; lunch.
Afternoon	Briefing with Civil Society: Parklands Institute Pembina Institute

	Sierra Club Prairie Chapter Greenpeace
Evening	5:00 – 6:30: Reception and light supper with local KAIROS committee and church representatives. King’s University College. 7:00 – 9:30: Ecumenical Roundtable discussion, facilitated by local KAIROS committee. King’s University College.
Friday May 22	
Morning	Worship and Breakfast together
Afternoon	Drive to Fort McMurray; meet with Fort McMurray First Nation and other Indigenous communities en route Accommodations: Sawridge Inn and Conference Centre 530 MacKenzie Boulevard, 780-791-7900
Evening:	Meeting with local ministerial Evening reflection/preparation for next day (formal or informal)
Saturday May 23	
Morning	Worship and Breakfast together 10:00: Fly (Mikisew Airlines) to Fort Chipewyan, with flyover of Suncor and Syncrude operations. Accommodations: Northern Lights B&B, community stays.
Afternoon	Community events in Fort Chipewyan

Evening	Evening reflection/preparation for next day (formal or informal)
Sunday May 24	
Morning	Breakfast together Church Service, Fort Chipewyan
Afternoon	2:00: Fly to Fort McMurray
Evening	Denominational meetings (as requested) or free time Evening reflection/preparation for next day (formal or informal)
Monday May 25	
Morning	Worship and Breakfast together 9:30: Guided tour of Suncor mining facility Noon: Lunch presentation/meeting with Oil Sands Developers Groups
Afternoon	2:00 – 3:00 Meeting with Mayor Melissa Blake. Community Meetings (to be confirmed): Communication, Energy, and Powerworkers' Union (CEP) Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) Community Services (including Dr. Michel Sauve) First Nations

Evening	<p>Ecumenical Community Event, facilitated by Fort McMurray Ministerial</p> <p>Evening reflection/preparation for next day (formal or informal)</p>
Tuesday May 26	
Morning	<p>Worship and Breakfast together</p> <p>8:30 Guided tour of Nexen Long Lake in situ project</p>
Afternoon	Community Meetings (continued; see May 25 afternoon, above).
Evening	<p>8:00 pm: Travel to Edmonton via Air Canada 8391</p> <p>Accommodations: Holiday Inn Edmonton Conference Centre</p> <p>4520 76 Avenue NW, (877) 654-0228</p>
Wednesday May 27	
Morning	<p>Joint Meeting with Provincial Ministries:</p> <p>Aboriginal Relations</p> <p>Energy</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Intergovernmental Affairs</p> <p>Oil Sands Sustainability Secretariat (Treasury Board)</p> <p>Premiers' Office</p> <p>Sustainable Resource Development</p>

	Meeting with Fort McMurray MLA Guy Boutilier
Afternoon	Working Lunch: Debrief (Possibly with Bishop Luc Bouchard) Possible Public Statement
Evening	Travel home (individual travel arrangements; KAIROS staff will transport delegates to airport).



KAIROS Ecumenical Delegation to the

Athabasca Tar Sands, May 21-27, 2009

Concluding Statement - June 11, 2009

An ecumenical delegation of ten leaders from Canadian churches and church organizations, a hereditary Indigenous chief from British Columbia and partners from Ecuador and Nigeria traveled in Alberta from May 21 to 27 to learn more about the tar sands and their impacts on people and the earth.

The delegation was organized by KAIROS (www.kairoscanada.org), which does social justice work for eleven churches and church-related organizations. As Christians, we seek a positive role in the care of God's creation, right relations among peoples, and economic justice – all of which raise questions about the Athabasca tar sands.

We came to Alberta to listen and learn from the people who live and work in the tar sands, Indigenous people who live downstream from them, church and community groups, the industry itself, unions, government, and environmental groups. At the end of our journey, we are left with enduring images and questions.

Local churches and communities in Alberta are deeply engaged in the tar sands and see great benefits from these projects. They don't want to lose jobs, and they are also concerned about the environment.

The people of Fort McMurray are rightly proud of their vibrant, multi-faceted community and its generous spirit. Our experience there has shown us that while the pace of tar sands development and the influx of workers have overburdened the town's infrastructure, the community itself is working hard to solve problems.

On our journey, we met with Indigenous peoples from Fort McMurray and Fort McKay First Nations. For a day and a half, we stayed in Fort Chipewyan, meeting with members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan Cree First Nation and the Metis. Some spoke of the economic benefits of the tar sands, of not wanting to damage that economy. Some mentioned receiving compensation for the use of their

traditional territories. Companies owned by Indigenous peoples contract services to the tar sands sector.

Yet we also heard that their way of life, as fishers, hunters and trappers, is being negatively affected, as well as the health of water and land. We heard that their concerns about the impacts of the tar sands developments have been largely ignored, how Treaty and Indigenous rights have not been respected, and of the need for greater involvement of Indigenous communities in tar sands planning.

In Fort Chipewyan, people told us of rare illnesses, the growing number of deaths from cancer and frightening changes to local ecology. We saw how rapidly the graveyard is filling up. People in Fort Chipewyan need answers about why this is happening and how it can be prevented.

Environmental groups point to the pace of ecological damage that needs bold action. Land reclamation lags far behind stripping and mining of the boreal forest.

Tar sands industry spokespeople are aware of and concerned about the ecological impacts of tar sands extraction, including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and possible impacts on water. Regarding possible aquifer or river contamination from extraction, greenhouse gas emissions and other dangers, they believe that the protections they are constructing will help considerably. In response to Indigenous health concerns, they reply that there is no proof these issues are related to tar sands development. They argue that tar leaches naturally from the soil into the river and for hundreds of years this has not been a problem. They state that 70 to 80% of greenhouse gas emissions are from cars and other consumer uses of oil and gas. Although Carbon Capture and Storage is much talked about in the media and by government, industry representatives note that it can only work in very limited situations.

We are concerned about the industry's response to the serious questions that have been raised, its determination to keep up the pace of development, and its confidence in what has been done to mitigate damage to people and ecosystems. The current pace of development along the Athabasca River is very different than what has occurred naturally for hundreds of years. Synthetic crude production is the most GHG-intensive form of fossil fuel production. In the face of climate change and the cumulative impacts

of environmental toxins, we believe that all responsible parties – individual consumers, industry, and government – must take a greater role in creating solutions.

Industry plans to increase the pace and expand the scope of tar sands development. It will adapt to more government regulation if it happens. Alberta government representatives emphasized the economic importance of the tar sands, and gave no indication they would strengthen government's role in regulating industry to protect the common good.

These are the conclusions we reached as a delegation:

As citizens, we all need to reduce consumption and help generate solutions.

We believe the tar sands pose serious, complex questions for Alberta, for Canada and beyond. These questions deserve public discussion and we will encourage this in our churches.

We agree with Indigenous peoples' and environmentalists' calls for independent studies on the cumulative impacts of the tar sands development, especially concerning water and ecosystems. These studies need to be accessible to the Canadian public.

We agree that tar sands development must respect and protect Indigenous peoples' rights.

We question the pace of tar sands development and the sustainability of the tar sands industry and the communities on which it has an impact. There is need for more regulation by the Alberta and Canadian governments to protect the common good.

Our delegation hopes to meet with elected federal government officials at the highest level. We believe Canada needs a sustainable energy policy, including targets for more renewable energy and sustainable livelihoods.

Our delegation thanks all who met with us for their kindness and honesty, and we hold their perspectives as important. Our faith inspires love for God's creation and a passion for protecting the most vulnerable - both peoples and ecosystems. We seek positive directions that will protect jobs, people and the earth.

June 8, 2009

Members of the Delegation

Church/Organizational Leaders

The Rev. Bruce Adema, Director of Canadian Ministries, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Dana Bush, Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (The Quakers)

Abe Janzen, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee Alberta

The Rev. Susan Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Sr. Anne Lewans, OSU, Ursulines of Prelate, Vice-President of the Canadian Religious Conference

The Right Rev. Thomas O. Morgan, Retired Archbishop of Saskatoon, Anglican Church of Canada

The Rev. Cheol Soon Park, Moderator of the 134th General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Donald Peters, Executive Director, Mennonite Central Committee Canada

The Very Rev. Bill Phipps, Former Moderator of the United Church of Canada

The Most Rev. V. James Weisgerber, Archbishop of Winnipeg, President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Indigenous and Southern Partners

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Ray Jones, Hereditary Chief, Gitksan First Nation, British Columbia

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